

Commencement Address
Pace University
by Admiral Stansfield Turner
Pleasantville, New York
1 June 1980

Tape Transcript

America's Changing Role

President Mortolla, , members of the class of 1980, I am indeed grateful that all of you together have asked me to be here today and in so doing, have acknowledged your understanding and your support of the Intelligence Community and the intelligence function of our country. I can say to you that contrary to many of the reports of the media today, the Central Intelligence Agency does not ask to be unlearned today; we ask instead and hope for greater understanding of the importance of what we do for our country and for some of the difficulties in performing that function. Again, the fact that you have asked me here is clear indication of your understanding and your support and I most appreciate that.

When thinking what I might to say to you, the members of the Class of 1980, today, quite naturally I thought back thirty-four years to when I was in your shoes and what the world around the United States was like at that time. I had been raised in the Middle West of our country in the 1930's, a period when the spirit of isolationism was very prevalent, particularly, in the mid-West. As I prepared to go to college, I never thought that a large part of my life would be dedicated to support the foreign policy of our country. I don't believe I even envisaged that I would ever travel as far away as Europe. Yet, by the time I graduated in 1946--a moment just like that for you today--the reality of isolationism in America had been extinguished by World War II.

By the end of that war, a profound change had taken place in this country. A country that just twenty-five years before had rejected membership in the League of Nations, the predecessor of the UN. Then in the post-war era, under the great leadership of President Truman, we evolved the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and the United Nations' resolution on Korea. The United States in those years became firmly committed to helping our friends and allies defend themselves against aggression. Suddenly America's interests were worldwide and the mantle of free world leadership was upon our shoulders. That changed my life, and that of your parents, markedly.

As you graduate today, I suggest that the United States faces changes in its relationships with the rest of the world that are just as profound and will affect your future just as markedly. The world in which the United States must exist in the 1980's will, I believe, be as different from that of the 60's and 70's as was my graduating world in the 40's from the decades just prior to that.

There is a big difference for you, however. It is that it is very likely that you will have to help our country adapt to this change without the kind of cataclysmic event, like a world war, to awaken us as it did in the 1940's. You will need to define a new role for the United States in its world leadership, in world conditions that are evolutionary and subtle--circumstances that you may not detect if you are not alert.

For example, look at the traditional role of the United States as leader of the Western Alliance. For thirty-five years, we have clearly been the dominant force in that Alliance. Can we expect to remain that dominant in the 1980's? We will still be the largest and by far the most powerful member of the team. Yet you would do well, I believe, to expect surprises from our allies.

Why? The Europeans and the Japanese are prosperous economically. They are stable politically. They feel independent and they deserve to. They still acknowledge, of course, that their security is inexorably related to their relationship with us. But the scramble today for oil and other natural resources has become so vital to them that they must have their own say in how the Western World tackles those problems. The Alliance is not doomed to weaken, but it is bound to function with far more regard for the independent voices of its members. It will be a different Alliance in the decades of your leadership.

If our relationships with our allies are going to change, so too will our relations with our key adversary, the Soviet Union. You will have to adjust to a quite different Soviet Union in the 1980's. From Stalin, Khrushchev, and on through Brezhnev, leadership of the Soviet Union heretofore has been cautious and conservative in avoiding any possible military confrontation with the United States. In the 1980's, however, we will be faced with the first Soviet leadership that does not feel militarily inferior to the United States.

Last December in Afghanistan the Soviet leaders committed their military forces to combat outside of the Soviet Bloc for the first time since World War II. Does this indicate a new aggressiveness, a new willingness to take risks? It seems to me that it does indicate at least that they are likely to take advantage of opportunities that may present themselves in the years ahead.

The CIA, however, has been predicting for a number of years that the economic fortunes of the Soviet Union are on the decline. What impact will this have, you may ask? Well, on the one hand, it may be that there will be pressures in the Soviet Union in the 1980's to undertake military adventures abroad in order to detract attention from their economic failures at home. May they not seek to rectify their problems of diminishing oil using military means? On the other hand, it is probable that their economic weaknesses may keep them at home, tending their own store.

Much depends, of course, on who the leaders of the Soviet Union will be in the 1980's and 1990's. One thing we can say for sure is that the present aged leadership will be gone. We can only predict that whoever succeeds them is unlikely to be as cautious or as predictable in dealing with the United States. You had better be prepared for more surprises from Moscow as you begin to assume the responsibility for our country's fortunes.

One other element of change that you are bound to encounter in the decade ahead will be the scramble for natural resources. The most obvious example is oil. But what about the other imports that we take for granted? We import all of our rubber; all of our coffee, chromium, cobalt, tin, and most of our magnesium and nickel. In all of these and in other cases, nations that used to be pliant to our needs when deciding how much of these resources to produce, are, tomorrow, going to look at their requirements much more than at ours. They will produce only that which generates the revenue which they need for their purposes, or which lets them conserve their natural resources in accordance with their concepts of the future.

When you couple more restrictive production policies with an increasing world population and the rising expectations of that population for a standard of living, you can see that there is taking place a great transference of power to nations that have never before exercised it.

In the decades of the 80's and 90's, you will have to understand those nations, their national aspirations, and the character of their people. You will have to negotiate with them far differently than we have even in the just recent past.

If you are to make sound decisions in the 80's and 90's, you must care about the world around you; pay attention to it. That applies whether your career development will go into government service or whether you contribute as a informed citizen. You must understand how our national interests relate to those of our allies and our potential enemies. Where those interests harmonize and where they conflict. And understanding that, you must help define our nation's role in the world.

This is not an easy challenge that I lay down for you; especially since the pressures on you to conform in outlook are probably going to greater than at any time in this century. Decade is the word that applies to the 80's because it is now, you must recognize, the decade of George Orwell. The class that follows you here at Pace University will be the Class of 1984. Already, George Orwell's "doublethink" is with us in some measure. Today you, as individuals, must stand up to the omnipresent, supremely superficial, instant analyses of our times by the television and news media. Only you can determine whether "Big Brother" will control your thinking; whether your understanding of our nation's role in the world will be dictated by the tube, or molded by your own independent thinking.

That is really why you have been here at Pace University--to develop your creative abilities and to learn to think independently--not just to learn the skills of any particular profession.

I challenge to reason soundly and think deeply about the world of the 1980's, and our nation's role in it because that role will continue to be vital to all free men. We can retain this mantle of world leadership or we can lose it in the decade just ahead. The reins of United States leadership will be in your hands much sooner than you think.

I congratulate you on the achievement of this great step in your lives. I also challenge you, as your careers go forward, to ensure that you seek to repay the privilege of this fine education. Each one of you can repay it by contributing to our nation's understanding of itself and our responsibilities in the complex world which will face you in the decades of your leadership. God bless you and good luck.

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America's Changing Role

Members of the graduating class of 1980, / I am very proud to join your teachers, / your parents and relatives, and your friends on this joyous day. / As I thought about what I would say to you today, / I could not help but think back to my own graduation / and the world I seemed to be entering at that time. / I grew up in the Middle West of the United States in the 1930's, / during a period when isolationism characterized our thinking about foreign policy, / and those attitudes were particularly strong in the Middle West. / As I prepared to go to college, / I never thought that a large part of my life would be spent / in support of the foreign policy of this country. / I never thought that I would travel even as far away as Europe. / Yet, by the time I graduated in 1946 / -- a moment like this today for you - / the reality of an isolationist America had been extinguished in the great crucible of World War II. /

By the end of that war, a profound change had taken place in this country. / A country that just two and one-half decades before / had rejected membership in the League of Nations, / under the great leadership of President Truman, / evolved the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and the UN Resolution on Korea. / In those years we

became firmly committed to help our friends and allies defend themselves against aggression. / Suddenly America's interests were worldwide / and the mantle of free world leadership was ours. / That changed my life, / and that of your parents, markedly. /

As you graduate today, / the United States faces changes in its relationship to the rest of the world / that are just as profound / and will surely affect your future markedly, also. / The world in which the United States must exist in the 1980's / will be as different from the world of the 1960's and 70's / as was the world of the 1940's different from the world I knew in the 1930's. /

A big difference for you, however, / is that it is very likely that you will have to help our country adapt to that change / without the kind of cataclysmic event, like a world war, / which awakened us in the 1940's. / You will need to define a new role for United States leadership / in a world where conditions are evolutionary and subtle / - circumstances which you may not detect if you are not alert. /

For example, look at the traditional role of the United States / as leader of the Western Alliance. / For thirty-five years, we have clearly been the dominant force within that Alliance. / Can we expect to remain dominant in the 1980's? / Will we still be the largest / and by far the most powerful member of that team? / ^{Let} You would do well to expect surprises from our allies. /

WHY?

The Europeans and the Japanese are prosperous economically. They are stable politically. They feel independent and deserve to. They still acknowledge, of course, that their security is inexorably tied to their relationship with us. But, the scramble today for oil and other natural resources has become so vital to them that they must have their own say in how the Western World copes with these problems. The Alliance is not doomed to weaken, but it is bound to function with far more regard for the independent voices of its members. There will be a different Alliance in the decades ahead of your leadership.

If our relationship with our allies must inevitably change, so too will our relations with our key adversary, the Soviet Union. You will have to adjust to a different Soviet Union in the 1980's. From Stalin, through Khrushchev, to Brezhnev, Soviet leadership has been cautious and conservative in avoiding possible military confrontations with the United States. In the 1980's, however, we will confront the first Soviet leadership that does not feel inferior to us militarily.

Last December in Afghanistan the Soviet leaders committed their military forces to combat outside the Soviet Bloc for the first time since World War II. Does this indicate a new aggressiveness, a new willingness to take risks? It seems to me that it does indicate at least that they are likely to continue to take advantage of opportunities when they occur.

The CIA, however, has been predicting a sharp

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decline in the

What about the deteriorating economic fortunes of the Soviet Union? ^{What impact?} ^{On one hand} Will the Soviet leaders of the 1980's ^{may} feel pressure to undertake military adventures to cover up their economic deficiencies at home? Will they use their military in efforts to augment their diminishing oil production? ^{On other} ^{may} Or will their economic weakness keep them at home tending the store?

Much depends, of course, on who those Soviet leaders of the 1980's will be. Surely the aged men who govern the Soviet Union today will be gone. We can only predict that whoever succeeds them is unlikely to be as cautious or as predictable in dealing with the United States. You had better be prepared for more surprises from Moscow ~~in the future than in the past.~~ ^{as you begin to assume responsibility for our country's fortunes}

Another element of change that you are bound to encounter in the 1980's will be the scramble for natural resources. The most obvious example is oil. But how about the other imports which we take for granted? We import all of our rubber; all of our coffee; chromium, cobalt, tin; and most of our manganese and nickel. In all of these and other cases, nations that used to be pliant to our needs for such resources are independently determining what it is best for them to produce, not what is best for us. They will produce only that which generates the amount of revenue which they need, or which lets them conserve their resources in accordance with their own dictates. ^{concept of the future}

When you couple more restrictive production policies with an increasing world population and the rising expectations of that population for a better standard of living, you can see that a great transference of power to nations that have never exercised it before is taking place.

In the decades of the 80's and the 90's you will have to understand those nations their national aspirations and the character of their people. You will have to negotiate with them far differently than we have even in the recent past.

It is my deepest hope that you will not have a world war to startle you into appreciating how different the role of the United States will be in the world of the 1980's than it was in the 1970's. Your parents and I did not have to be as perceptive as you will have to be. We had a world war which jolted this country into a new awareness of its changed role in the world.

If you are to make sound decisions in the 1980's and the 1990's, you must care about the world around us and, you must pay attention to it. That applies whether you enter the military, or other government service, or whether you pursue a civilian life.

You must understand how our national interests, as well as those of our allies and potential enemies relate. Where those interests harmonize and where they conflict. And, understanding that, you must help to define our nation's role in the world.

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This is not an easy challenge, especially since the pressures on you to conform in your outlook will be greater than perhaps any time in this century. Do not forget that George Orwell's decade is here. The class that replaces you next fall will be the Class of 1984. George Orwell's "doublethink" is already with us in some measure. Today you, as individuals, must stand up to the omnipresent, supremely superficial, instant analyses of our times by the television networks and the written media. Only you can determine ^{whether} ~~if~~ "Big Brother" will direct your thinking, whether your understanding of our nation's role in the world will be dictated by the tube or molded by your own independent thinking.

That is really why you have been here at Pace University to develop your creative abilities and to learn to think independently -- ^{just} not to learn the skills of any particular profession.

I challenge you to reason soundly and deeply about the world of the 1980's, and our nation's role in it, because that role will continue to be critical to all free men. We can retain the mantle of world leadership or we can lose it. The reins of United States leadership will be in your hands much sooner than you think.

I congratulate you on the achievement of this great step in your ^{careers} ~~careers~~. I also challenge you, as your ^{careers} ~~careers~~ move forward, to ensure that you each seek to repay the privilege of this fine education. Each one of you can repay it by contributing to our nation's understanding of itself and our responsibilities in the complex world which we will face in the decades of your leadership. Good luck and God bless you.

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